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PROGRAM ABC World News Tonight STATION WJLA-TV  
ABC Network

DATE May 13, 1985 7:00 PM CITY Washington, DC

SUBJECT CIA Denies Covert Operations

PETER JENNINGS: The Central Intelligence Agency said today it had nothing to do with the car-bombing in Beirut at the beginning of March which killed 80 people.

In yesterday's Washington Post there was a report that a Lebanese group which had been trained by the CIA had gone off on its own and set the car bomb. Today's denial by the agency has not meant the end of the story.

Here's ABC's Ann Compton, in Washington.

ANN COMPTON: the car bomb that Friday morning in suburban Beirut left 80 Lebanese dead, but not its intended target, a militant Shiite leader, Muhammad Hussein Fadallah, thought to be responsible for attacks against U.S. installations.

The Washington Post reported this weekend the bombing was carried out by a group indirectly connected to the Reagan Administration's anti-terrorist plan. The bombing prompted the CIA to cancel training for a Lebanese unit recruited to counter terrorism. But today, the CIA is insisting the people it trained were not the same ones who set off the car bomb March 8th.

EDWARD DJEREJIAN: The CIA never conducted any training of Lebanese security forces related to the events described in the Washington Post's story on May 12th.

COMPTON: But on Capitol Hill, the reports have re-kindled suspicions about CIA covert operations running out of control.

REPRESENTATIVE PATRICIA SHCROEDER: What in the world are we doing using tax dollars to finance hit squads in the Middle East?

COMPTON: The Vice Chairman of Senate Intelligence, Patrick Leahy, revealed he's investigating a half-dozen covert operations. But he supports attacking the terrorists before they can attack Americans.

SENATOR PATRICK LEAHY: The U.S. must be able to stop terrorists. If that requires preventive strikes, then the United States must be in a position to do that.

COMPTON: Leahy complains the CIA should go after terrorists with its own forces, not surrogates who operate beyond American control.

But tonight, the Administration is more concerned these headlines might provoke reprisals by the terrorists. U.S. embassies are on alert.